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Building Strategic Partnerships For Career Development

The state with the best workforce wins! Michigan is competing with other states, and other nations worldwide, for the best jobs. Having a high quality workforce translates into attracting and keeping the best companies, which in turn translates into a better standard of living.

A high quality workforce depends on the quality of the system that equips people with the proper skills, habits, and attitudes at all stages of life — *before* entering the workforce, *while* on the job, and *between* one job or career and another. Thus, Michigan's career development system consists of three components:

- The **Career Preparation System** - schools, colleges and universities that prepare the emerging workforce;
- The **Worker Enhancement System** – training and career guidance to improve the skills and career prospects of people already employed; and
- The **Workforce Development System** – job placement, job training, literacy, and rehabilitative services programs that help workers transition from unemployment and dependency to jobs and independent living.

The success of Michigan in keeping its economy and workforce strong depends upon the success of each of these components. To produce a workforce with the skills required in today's economy, and tomorrow's, the state undertook a strategy that would improve state leadership and encourage system building at the local and regional level.

At the state level, the Governor created a dynamic agency that has the authority *and* responsibility to inform residents about the workplace, help people choose the education and training options that are best for them, facilitate worker certifications based on demonstrated competencies and standards endorsed by employers, provide placement services that help workers secure employment, and upgrade the skills of the current workforce. By bringing these activities and their sponsoring state agencies under a single umbrella, the Michigan Department of Career Development (MDCD) can leverage state-level resources to meet local goals and objectives.

Local Strategic Plans

To foster system building at the local level, MDCD initiated a process to encourage its local partners to work together rather than in isolation. Each of the 25 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), along with school districts and community colleges working through Education Advisory Groups (EAGs) in their region, decided they would collaborate to improve their region's competitiveness. Each developed a regional blueprint or plan for success that would mobilize resources from all partner agencies to achieve a few common strategic goals.

This alignment of efforts to achieve the community's vision for its future is in stark contrast to the former way of doing business in which each agency has a separate plan for each program and competes with neighboring agencies for available funds. This new approach requires common understanding of the demographic, economic, and social trends that will impact the community's future, as well as widespread agreement among residents on how resources ought to be deployed to create the workforce that will be necessary to achieve the vision. This process fosters within every region a "Strategic Partnership for Career Development."

continued

Trends and Issues

Success depends upon clearly identifying the most significant trends and issues in workforce development and clearly articulating goals and actions to address them. Since February 2000, MDCD's 25 regional Workforce Development Boards have been working to identify major trends and issues affecting workforce development in their respective areas. The seven most common trends—identified by at least a third of the state's WDBs—are shown below.

Most Prominent Emerging Trends

- Increasing demand for worker training and a shortage of workers in future years
- Gap between existing and required job skills
- Need for technology-based or advanced skills
- Quality of life issues in the local region
- Aging population
- Low or falling academic achievement
- Increasing need for English-as-a-Second Language programs

Goals and Actions

MDCD recognizes the need to act at the state and local level to address these issues through strategic planning and action. The most common goals and actions identified by the 25 WDBs are shown below.

Most Prominent Goals and Actions

- Increase enrollment in workforce education and activities
- Increase partnerships between businesses and career development service providers
- Promote career development services
- Improve academic performance
- Facilitate communication between educators and businesses
- Establish an information clearinghouse to support career development
- Strengthen the adult education system
- Strengthen current workers' skills
- Improve career partnerships among students, parents, teachers, and businesses

All regions completed their strategic plans during 2001 and success stories are beginning to emerge. Here are some initiatives covered by the local strategic plans:

- Population trends in the Capital Area region identified a need for more English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) instruction. ESL programs were expanded at Lansing Community College through programs with intensive instruction and flexible hours of operation. More than 100 students signed up within 48 hours. This model has been exported to 11 other areas.
- In the Northwest Michigan region, there has been a great influx of Eastern European, Asian, and Hispanic immigrants. Special ESL software covering several languages has now been installed in four regional "learning labs." Further, a partnership with the Traverse City Schools now offers ESL classes for the entire family in Community Learning Centers.
- Region 7B discovered that many people want to seek their GED but have difficulty attending school while working. Through the Partnership for Adult Learning, the Iosco RESA (Regional Education Service Agency) and local businesses collaborate on work and class schedules to allow people ages 19 to 55 to earn their GED.
- Washtenaw County concluded in its strategic plan that its Michigan Works! Service Center could be improved by expanding the presence of Washtenaw Community College. Now the community college is a partner in the center, providing \$100,000 in tuition vouchers for customers not eligible for other funding and conducting computer literacy programs on-site.

MDCD has built a career development system from the ground up, and strategic plans to maintain and enhance the system are in place. The leadership to carry out these plans — the Workforce Development Boards and Education Advisory Groups — is firmly established at the local level.